

Statement of Representative Tom Udall (NM-03)
June 15, 2006

Mr. Speaker:

For over three years, our nation has invested in Iraq. In human and political costs, it has been a heavy toll. We have lost thousands of American and Iraqi lives, spent billions of dollars, and squandered the greatest outpouring of international support and alliance in decades. And through it all, we have misplaced our focus on the threat of Islamic terrorism. It is time for us to prepare to redeploy our forces from Iraq by the end of the year.

Some successes have occurred. The recent killing of Islamic extremist al Zarqawi by coalition forces offers an opportunity to stem the steady tide of internal terrorist attacks in Iraq, while the welcome news that several important cabinet ministers have been appointed demonstrates progress being made. Nevertheless, these glimpses of optimism cannot mask the overwhelming recognition that this was a war of choice. The Administration invaded Iraq without the necessary international support and without plans for stability, reconstruction and governance.

Earlier this year, I visited Iraq and saw first-hand the reality of our investment. While our troops bravely fight, there are few areas of security or safety. Sectarian violence and civil strife have eclipsed the progress of free elections. Unemployment continues unabated, radical clerics promote hate, and anti-American sentiment has spread with fervor. At the same time that the President is urging that we “stay the course,” we are approaching 2,500 American troops killed. And more and more, we are learning the costs back home: families losing loved ones and soldiers physically and mentally scarred by war.

We have helped sow the seeds of democracy, but now the people of Iraq must take charge and bring about their own destiny. We cannot force our way of life or our ideals upon any other nation, nor should that ever be our mission. Rather, we must encourage them to bring about their own change, and promise that as long as democracy and liberty is their desire, we will be their ally and be devoted to their success. To prolong this transition will only deepen their dependence on our resources, will further radicalize those who use our presence as an enticement for hate, and will distract us away from where our focus must lie.

It was only a few short years ago that this Congress, with bipartisanship and unity, supported the President in embarking against the terrorist threat by ousting the Taliban from Afghanistan. All of our allies, and some of our enemies, recognized the strength of our convictions in defeating those who promote radicalism and extremism, and we were joined by the largest coalition in history. But then we detoured and launched an ill-advised military operation in Iraq. The results have been damaging and instead of achieving success globally, we have reached and sowed frustration and recalcitrance.

I believe we are seeing ever-increasing signs that our resources in Iraq must now be shifted to finish the job in Afghanistan and work with our allies to defeat the terrorist threat. Not because we have failed or succeeded, but because the process of democracy is never-ending, and it is time for the Iraqi people to stand up and lead the way toward their future. Through redeployment and reallocation, we can provide regional support to those areas most susceptible to terrorism. We can refocus our attention to eradicating the leaders of hate who use global networks to promote radicalism. And we can strengthen our ability to develop multilateral approaches, reinvesting in the idea that key alliances is the best way in which to bring about democracy and stability throughout the world.

There are some who will argue that patriotism and criticism are mutually exclusive. This is utterly false. Our strength of promoting democracy, liberty and freedom must be coupled with the wisdom of recognizing our fallibility. The difference between those who believe we must stay the course in Iraq and those who believe we must change course lies not in degrees of patriotism, but rather in truthful disagreement over policy. Confusing the two leads only to division and partisanship, and we must avoid at all costs to allow an issue of such importance to be clouded with such rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, I was against our nation going into Iraq, but at every step of the way, I have supported our men and women in uniform in their mission. I have objected to the heavy-handed foreign policy of the Administration, but have desired to see hope and progress for the Iraqi people. And now, I call for our troops in Iraq to be redeployed by the end of the year, so that we might refocus on terrorism, and so that our nation can begin to again shore up the international support it will need in the long and arduous cause of rooting out terrorism and promoting democracy and freedom throughout the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.